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Dear Friends,

'who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.'

It's been eight weeks since our move to Llanharan and during this time of building our home we have had a considerable number of deliveries. The Vicarage is located off the main road in a quiet and secluded location – so secluded that virtually every delivery driver has had to contact us to find out where we are. Not only that but, despite our instructions to ring the doorbell at the side of the house and leave packages in the inside porch, we still get cards and messages telling us they were unable to deliver as no one was at home when we were sitting in the lounge. I am sure you have experienced the same!

Instructions can be simple like 'take two tablets three times a day'. They can be useful; 'don't operate if wires are faulty'. They can be complicated: 'are you in a bubble or the same household?' Sometimes they are confusing and don't make any sense at all, like keeping to the restrictions until the 19th July then scrapping them. Instructions are a part of our everyday life.

I prefer illustrated instructions. Simon, my husband, prefers written instructions. Have you noticed how nothing arrives without instructions? Nothing seems to arrive in its finished form, from flat packs to plants. Every time I construct even the simplest item there always seems to be spare parts left, or parts missing, and I wonder what I have done wrong (that famous Swedish furniture store comes to mind!).

Keen to commence growing our own vegetables, we ordered some raised beds. The beds consisted of four pieces of wood, a few corner fittings, and screws, and yes, you guessed it, there was a two-page set of instructions. Initially I wasn't convinced that we needed these instructions but was thankful because there were two corner pieces missing. Maybe that would have been missed without the instructions, or perhaps we would have worked it out.

As we await the arrival of our greenhouse, purchased with the parish's very generous wedding gift, I can't help but feel a little anxious about its construction, which I am sure will be detailed in a 50-page booklet of instructions! Hopefully, there will be both illustrations and written instructions!

But, on the whole, instructions are important to us. They are part of our everyday life. Today we read the opening of St Paul's letter to the people of Ephesus. All the letters attributed to Paul make up nearly two-thirds of the New Testament and they contain instructions on how to live and they illustrate for us the mystery of God in the transformative power of Christ, to unify not only community, but the whole of humanity. I may have said this before; I would describe Paul as a bit like marmite and I have to admit I have a bit of a love-hate relationship with him. Sometimes his instructions make sense and at other times he leaves me baffled. Sometimes I am irritated by him and other times I am inspired by him. Today the reading reminds us of our faith in Christ, no shock there, but what Paul does is he begins with one of the most important instructions of all, Praising God.

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.'

Then the letter reminds us of how God has always desired to share himself with the whole of his creation which has been with us from the beginning

'Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.'

Open communication and trusting relationship with God have been God's desire, or will from the beginning. Throughout time prophets have come to give insight or instructions, if you like, to

God's plan for his people. Paul, as one who understood the Hebrew scriptures, would know God's revelation to his people through relationships with prophets such as Amos and John the Baptist (see the readings for today).

Paul tells us how God reveals his true purpose in Christ, and we are his children, loved and held in his grace

'adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.'

and then there's a reminder

'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.'

I don't know about you, but I find these words powerful. Paul is a master craftsman because here he reminds us of what Christian community is all about. And then, finally, he explains what this means and how the Holy Spirit is our guide.

'In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.'

All Paul's letters contain instructions on how Christian communities can flourish. There may be times when they are needed. There may be times when you feel they are not, but instructions mean nothing if we don't have an idea of why we are following them or what we are aiming towards, a community who gives thanks and is working towards unity and reconciling a broken world.

There is no point having instructions of how to build and bring in the Kingdom, or how to live, if we don't remind ourselves of why we are doing this in the first place, and every now and again it's worth revisiting these things. Christ is the cornerstone upon which the Kingdom is founded. Thanks be to God.

Love in Christ

Belinda

Thank you to all of you gifts and cards for my recent ordination. The Bishop of Llandaff Dahlia is in flower!

